How is it possible to construct a narrative and a reflection about contemporary Brazilian feminism for an international event that intends to conduct a review of feminist theory and activism on a global level, by bringing together feminist researchers from several countries? Even if it is necessary to contextualize some of the central features of Brazilian feminism, I will also try not to reproduce any division of intellectual work (that we still find in gender and feminist studies), which affirms that in the South (the peripheral countries) we only offer descriptions and experiences, while theories are produced in the North (Europe and the United States).

Thus, in a brief historical contextualization of Brazilian feminism, as well as a survey of some central aspects of the current situation and my description of a selection of personal and field experiences (including my feminist activism in the 1980s, participation in academic feminist networks and at the journal Estudos Feministas – ‘Feminist Studies’ – in addition to field research realized at several feminist and gender forums, particularly the tenth Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting), I intend to offer an analysis that can contribute to understanding contemporary feminist complexities, not only in Brazil but transnationally.

the historical context and current situation

Any history of contemporary feminisms in Brazil and Latin America must necessarily mention the relatively recent history of military dictatorships in Brazil and the region in general. In Brazil, the groups, organizations and feminist movements that arose in the mid–1970s were strongly marked by the political repression and persecution of the period, and the thus clandestine nature of the organization of leftist and opposition groups. Many feminist activists from that period refer to their situation as a dual-militancy (in both the political parties and organizations engaged in the struggle against the dictatorship and for the end of capitalism, as well as in feminist groups). For
many authors, these conditions are characteristic of the so-called second feminist wave in Brazil and throughout Latin America, which is often described as something produced by values and discussions brought from Europe and the United States to South American countries. However, I totally agree with the recent criticisms of the demarcation of 'waves' of occidental feminism and the establishment of external origins of Latin-American feminism in that period.\textsuperscript{2}

Certainly, the presence of Brazilian militants in exile and their contact with European and US feminisms were important factors in the dissemination of ideas through the country and for the rise of some feminist groups in the mid-1970s. This is one of the factors in the formation of contemporary feminism in Brazil as well as Latin America in general, but not the only one. In addition to considering historical factors of women's struggles in Europe and the United States since the late nineteenth century, it is necessary to look at women's presence, their specific organizations and the fight for equality (even among those that had not considered themselves feminists), in the social movements active in the country in the twentieth century. To mention just some of these political, cultural and artistic movements: anarcho-syndicalism in the early twentieth century; the Brazilian modernist movement; the women's fight for the vote and citizenship and the acquiring of these rights in the 1930s; the popular movements of the 1950s and 1960s, including the rural movements in Northeast Brazil; women's participation in counter-culture movements and in artistic vanguards linked to music, film and other arts. I am identifying here some feminisms beyond the self-designation and traditional contours of what would be Feminism (with a capital F). A possible parallel is made with the new Brazilian union movement that emerged in the industrialized ABC region of greater São Paulo in the 1970s and 1980s, which while it did not define itself as a socialist movement, in several aspects can be interpreted as carrying, at that time, a democratic and popular ideal and as a bearer of a new political culture that broke with the bureaucracy and hierarchies of traditional unionism.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the concepts of general and specific struggle penetrated the discussions, but it is impossible to reduce this tension and to simply present either the often homogenous view that leftist organizations had of feminism or that feminist groups had of the general struggle. Contrary to what some analysts may affirm about the refusal of feminism within the Latin-American left, sensitivity to 'the women's question' differed among leftist organizations. This narrative about a homogenous and anti-feminist left has allowed some feminists to justify their weak political articulation with issues beyond gender specificity. If it is true that the emergence of a mass feminist movement produced a crisis among leftist organizations, many of them responded to the crisis by making an even greater effort to establish platforms that tried to speak to what were, at the time, referred to as 'women's issues'. In addition, the textual and theoretical activity on women's questions and sexuality...
among the international left, even before the mass feminist struggles in Europe in the 1970s, is in no way insignificant. The same is true of the struggle for homosexual rights.

After the military dictatorship, Brazilian feminism was situated among what were called in the 1980s ‘new social movements’, which had as their main characteristic the emergence of different political subjects. A criticism of economic reductionism (even the movements directly engaged in the union struggles such as workers in Brazil’s large industrial regions were included in this definition because they broke with the old forms of union struggle and stimulated what was called a ‘new political culture’) and the practice of a non-hierarchical democracy. However, as some authors indicate, at the end of the dictatorship, the autonomous feminist organizations, which seemed to have no core group and no internally formalized hierarchies, underwent an institutionalization process that took several routes. Some of them formally established themselves as not-for-profit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), receiving financial resources from international agencies. Meanwhile, other groups were dissolved, as their militants were incorporated into government organizations or entered academic careers. The Brazilian feminist field is today a quite plural and diversified territory, which includes not only organizations, groups, networks, movements and NGOs focused on a specific feminist agenda, but intense academic activity as well. It has grown tremendously since the 1980s with financing for private (some of it assumed by international foundations like Ford and MacArthur) and public research. Feminist demands have also been integrated into public policy agendas and the creation of government agencies, marked by Brazil’s new 1988 Constitution.

The feminist field today can be considered to include three different spheres: the movement itself; the government sphere; and the academic sphere. This classification is relative and has greater heuristic and analytical value than as a concrete description of the field, particularly concerning the borders between each of these dimensions which are certainly porous. Besides, we must also consider experiences outside the more visible and recognized feminist spaces, most of them excluded from most narratives of feminist history and related to lower class, Black, indigenous and other women. However, the classification is useful for understanding some recent political processes and the way that the local and global configure themselves in the constitution of the Brazilian feminist field.

To consider how the Brazilian government has treated the feminist agenda, we must distinguish the different instances that form the Brazilian State and the historically complex relations between the feminist movement and institutional powers. The first civil Brazilian government after the military dictatorship was installed in 1985 and it created the National Woman’s Rights Council in which feminist militants took part. In the same period, women’s groups and feminist organizations had an important role in the construction of the new Brazilian
Constitution, successfully guaranteeing a series of rights in the new constitutional text. Later, a quota system was adopted for female candidates on political party slates in electoral disputes. In 1995, 300 delegates were sent by the Brazilian government to the United Nations meeting in Beijing, ten times more than the previous meeting, many of them feminist activists and a few who were women engaged in popular movements.

The first government of President Luiz Inácio 'Lula' da Silva created a Special Ministry of Women's Policies that has already organized two National Conferences of Politics for Women, the final documents of which are considered 'government policy'. These Conferences, like others on different issues, were organized under principles of 'participative democracy'. Regional and then state delegates were selected in open local forums and conferences held throughout the country, from which delegates were chosen to participate in the National Conference. In 2008, the First National GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transvestite and Transsexual) Conference took place, financed by the Brazilian government as a result of dialogue with civil society organizations. The political platforms defined at each one of these conferences are generally quite advanced, incorporating central demands and issues raised by local groups, NGOs and movements.

By way of example, a decision by the Health Ministry reveals federal government action on the feminist agenda: public hospitals were obliged to conduct 'legal abortions' (in a context of a very restrictive law that criminalizes abortion). The Ministry decision has faced the resistance of religious and traditional social sectors. Nevertheless, if part of the executive power in the current Lula Government is quite sympathetic to social movements as well as the feminist and GLBT agenda, the same is not true of the national Congress, which is responsible for making and changing laws. A group formed by Catholic and Evangelical congressional representatives and those from other traditional groups have systematically opposed the demands most central to the movements: the legalization of abortions for feminists; and of civil union and marriage between persons of the same sex for the GLBT movement. We can say that although Brazil today has government policies that are at least partially feminist, with a Ministry for Politics for Women, with activists participating at several levels of government and with the organization of national conferences, we still do not have a state policy on women's issues. There is no guarantee that after the current government these victories and this new space, which has been opened up for feminism and feminists within governmental initiatives will be maintained.5

In an assessment of the feminist movement, its organizations, struggles, agenda and so on, some authors have shown concern for the growing tendency of 'NGO-ization'6 of feminist groups and movements. Previously, issue based and policy-oriented groups have become institutions with quite specialized objectives, activists have become professionals who are increasingly dependent

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5 One of the demands of the participants at the first National Meeting on Gender and Science, also financed by the Special Women's Ministry (SPM) in

6 'NGO-ization' refers to the phenomenon of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) becoming influential actors in the political and social landscape, often with a focus on specific issues or movements, such as feminism and GLBT rights.
on financing from international agencies and thus very much becoming defined by their agendas and working methods. In addition, many of these groups provide services that might otherwise be the responsibility of the State. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of several groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (which at first functioned with the voluntary activity of their members and few resources) as NGOs was perhaps the only option for maintaining these groups at a time of professionalization of political life. Certainly, the question of financing for these groups, NGOs and feminist meetings deserves a special chapter in the recent history of Latin-American feminisms. A polemical issue on several occasions (particularly at feminist meetings) has been the question of the loss of feminist autonomy, now not in relation to political parties, but in relation to the State, the United Nations and international financial agencies.

Another important aspect of the movement at this period in time is the formation of networks and thematic articulations, whether ideologically or identity based, which were also more or less institutionalized. This development includes the Catholic Women for the Right to Choice (about abortion), the Articulation of Brazilian Women, the World March of Women and also the Marcosur Feminist Articulation. The latter represents two important political currents of Latin-American feminism, which had a strong presence at the different meetings of the World Social Forum when it was held in Porto Alegre, in southern Brazil. A number of these organizations, which form the most visible and recognized face of Brazilian feminism, are composed of women who are middle class intellectuals, with many of them alternating between activism and government positions and advisory activities. As Maria Luisa Femenías (2006) discusses, these are ’peripheral and tensely hegemonic’, peripheral because they are the others of Central European–North American feminism, and hegemonic in relation to the other Latin-American women, the latter marked by a still more radical alterity.

Among these developments it is important to register that feminism, the struggle for women’s rights and for gender equality, also exists in plural movements, actions and forms of popular and peripheral organizations, such as those formed by rural women and rural workers, as well as the women of popular and peripheral urban communities and so on. Perhaps these are the women who now experience the dilemma of dual-militancy. Many of them have ties to both popular social movements and to gender equality politics. Another important dimension of Brazilian and Latin-American feminist movements is the space of the meetings organized by the movements themselves, particularly the Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings, and also at feminist meetings and networks organized within the World Social Forum (see REF, 2003). Later I will comment on the tenth Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting, which took place in Serra Negra, São Paulo, in October 2005.

6 For a critical discussion about this notion see Álvarez (2009).
7 See Alvarez (2000); Thayer (2003); Piscitelli (2005), among others.
8 Formed in the preparatory moment of the participation of the Brazilian activists at the Beijing meeting, in 1995, AMB became one of the main political forces in Brazilian feminism. See Alvarez (2000).
9 International network and movement, with its origins in Canada, with the aim to unite women from different countries around a common project articulating the feminist struggle with an anti-capitalist project.
10 Responsible for the campaign ’Su boca es fundamental contra los fundamentalismos’ (’your mouth is fundamental against fundamentalism’).
11 Like the MMTR, Rural Women Workers Movement and the MMC, Peasant Women Movement. About the peasant women, see Thayer (2001) and two dossiers of
The third social and political space of contemporary feminism in Brazil defined by Adrião (2008) is that of academic activity in universities throughout the country, which since the second half of the 1980s has undertaken research, taught undergraduate and graduate courses, organized study and research centres and published scholarly journals. Initially, a large part of the financial resources for this research, particularly scholarships or financing for specific projects, was provided by foreign foundations, such as Ford (through the Carlos Chagas Foundation) and MacArthur. With the creation of the Special Ministry for Women's Policies, a number of specific calls for research projects in the gender field were published, in addition to awards for scholarly work in the field. One of the issues that deserves greater analysis is the way that the research agenda is established. An examination of the different lines of financing and requests for proposals from non-governmental foundations reveals a succession of issues that have slowly begun to construct an agenda for gender studies in Brazil. The subjects have ranged from the broadest issues of women's studies at the start, shifting towards the language of gender studies, which is a mirroring of directions and demands in international agencies (Thayer, 2001). Within this there has been a move towards more specialized issues such as masculinities, reproductive rights and recently youth, which can be included in what the research financing agencies generally call ‘induced demand’ (in this case by the international financing agencies). Nevertheless, the funding agencies are only one of the realms of circulation of concepts and theories in a more complex and dynamic movement. 13

The increased public financing in Brazil, found in the requests for proposals issued by the SPM and the National Research Council, and the increased financing for studies in fields such as health, violence, human rights and so on was accompanied by an opportunity to create a broader agenda in the field of gender studies, permitting a critical reflection on academic production in the fields of gender and feminism.

Scholarly publications in this field have also increased in quantity and scope in recent years. The journal Estudos Feministas was created in 1992 and is now edited at the Federal University at Santa Catarina (UFSC). It publishes three issues a year and can be found online at scielo.br and in Scielo Social Sciences (http://socialsciences.scielo.org/), which has an English version of selected articles as well. Cadernos Pagu, published at Campinas University (Unicamp) – is another important publication, as are Cadernos Espaço Feminino, edited from Uberlândia Federal University and Revista Gênero at the Fluminense Federal University. There are also several annual scholarly meetings and congresses on gender. In addition to the meetings of Redefem (The Brazilian Feminist Studies Network) and Redor (The Feminist Women Studies Network of the Brazilian North and Northeast), the Seminário Internacional Fazendo Gênero (International Seminar, Making Gender), which has taken place every 2 years since 1994 at UFSC, is another forum that has expanded its reach, with the active participation of
academic feminists from Brazil and several Latin-American countries. There are also regular meetings on specific issues, such as Gender and Media, and Gender and Sciences. The latter is organized by the SPM to discuss gender politics in Brazilian scientific research and to establish new policies for research support and gender studies.

There is intense interaction between the three sites discussed above – government, academic and movement. In the same way that activists in some groups and NGOs move easily through government circles, some academic feminists do so as well. The relationship between university and feminist movements seems not to be so open, making the state a powerful component today in the constitution of Brazilian contemporary feminism. This is a relative factor, because there are many initiatives aimed at establishing dialogue between academic theories and practice as well as movement practice (Maluf, 2004). But who are these groups and women that have poor access to institutional and more visible areas, and are almost absent in the feminist mainstream? I will address this question below. First, to offer a concrete context, I will offer a reflection on the tenth Latin-American and Caribbean Meeting of 2005, in Serra Negra, São Paulo.

the feminist meetings and the tenth meeting

The tenth Latin-American and Caribbean Meeting assembled some 10,000 women in a hotel in Serra Negra in São Paulo State, Brazil. A few weeks before the meeting, an intense debate arose via e-mail and on the meeting website over a request made by transgender groups to be included in the meeting and refusal by the organizing committee. At the opening session of the meeting, the coordinating group justified the decision with the argument that since there had been no previous discussion, it would be better to respect the structure of the previous meetings and discuss the proposal during the tenth meeting for inclusion of the 'trans' at the eleventh.

The new element that was raised by this debate was not so much the discussion about who can or cannot participate at the meeting, nor the participation of transgenders in particular. As some people recalled at several moments, transgender persons have always been present and moved freely within the feminist meetings, but they had never requested their participation as a specific 'political identity', with the right to complete participation, including voting rights. In other words, they had always participated as individual feminists, but as such had been diluted among the other women. The intense debate about transgenders as a representative political grouping captured nearly all the attention before, during and after the meeting, marking one of the few moments in which an issue was voted on at the final plenary session. As a matter of
institutional reference and memory, it is important to remember that at the third meeting in Bertioga, also in Brazil, 20 years earlier, several women from a Rio de Janeiro favela arrived in a bus demanding the right to participate in the meeting without paying the registration fee. Alvarez et al. (2003) described this event and argued that, at that time, the bus episode was seen to be organized by political parties to erode feminist credibility, since the organizers had secured scholarships 'to enable working-class women to attend the meeting' (ibid.). But this supposition does not invalidate the evidence, highlighted by the authors, that the inclusion of working, poor and Black women in feminism was something that needed to be discussed more seriously.

The ‘trans’ episode at the tenth meeting illustrates, in a paradigmatic way, how some questions become (or continue) to serve as a focus of self-definition for feminism and of its constitutive borders. The arguments for or against the participation of the ‘trans’ at the feminist meeting mobilized two kinds of issues that have instigated other moments of militant or academic feminism. The first concerns the political-theoretical place of the subject of feminism and above all, more recently, the place of theorization and discursive conceptualization inside the movement about who its own subjects are, about which the qualified and qualifying political places of feminist discourse are and about the ways that these subjects and subjectivities have been constructed inside the movement – that is, the political regimes of subjectivation inside the movement. The second type of question, related to the first, refers to the concepts of gender and woman used by activist feminism. These questions appeared in other moments, situations and themes of the tenth meeting: the strong presence of the self-denominated ‘young feminists’, individually or in organized groups, who also affirmed their presence as a specific group, joining with other identity discourses, such as those of lesbian, Black and indigenous women; the important place given to ‘experience’ – through workshop participations – at a moment of strong demand for theoretical reflection (expressed among other things by the ‘trans’ debate that permeated the meeting but that had little space in the formal activities).

British anthropologist Henrietta Moore (2000) warns of the need to consider how a single society, culture or group can present different gender models, values and conceptions. My interpretation of this warning leads me to propose that different gender theories not only co-exist in academic and intellectual debates, but also within social practices, discourses, activism and political action. The polemic over transgender participation at feminist forums and meetings has shifted the identity debate inside feminism to a different register, highlighting not only the heterogeneity of the political subjects of feminism, but also the different and sometimes antagonistic views of gender, subject and subjectivities, and a struggle over what is the meaning of being a woman and a feminist. As discussed before, at previous Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings,
the question of what it means to 'be a feminist' was discussed mostly in relation to the participation of women from the lower classes, who were not explicitly self-identified with the feminist discourse and with 'official' feminist history. Earlier this question focused on the issue of whether 'dual-militants' are or are not feminist. For a discussion of these debates at the feminist meetings, see Alvarez et al. (2003).

The main arguments for the participation of the 'trans' were presented in a document entitled 'Why We Want to Open Feminist Meetings to Transgender Persons', which had been circulated before the tenth meeting. The document and the discourses during the plenary presented a set of reasons for the participation: the meaning of being a feminist; the self-definition of being a woman; the relevance of discussions about 'trans' identities to the advancement of feminist theoretical discussions; and the fight for a feminism that 'genuinely integrates ethnic, generational, linguistic, sexual and social class diversities'. Those opposing the presence denounced the precariousness and the novelty of this discussion and the risks that it was still an incipient and not fully considered debate. Some of them made a more obvious defense of what they called a 'realistic position', which understood gender difference as a display of a 'biological question'. At the same time, some of the voices that defended the 'trans' participation raised arguments of a biological and medical order, arguing that, if the physicians recognize them as women, so we should do the same. Arguments emerged that delegated to external instances the decision and the capacity to decide who is a 'woman' (medicine and science, the organizing commission of the meetings, the movement). As did arguments that radically supported the absolute right of the individual subject to conduct a self-assertion.16 But if all of these debates (concerning transgenders, young feminists, lesbians, indigenous and Black women, among others) have the issue of the subject as one of the central questions of contemporary feminism in common, there is a difference in the form as well in the direction in which this subject is considered in any one of them. On the one hand, the transgender persons' demand to be included as women and feminists at the meetings relates to a centripetal process that pulls them into a common centre, to a sharing (in difference) of a 'common identity' with women and feminists at the meeting ('we are also women'). On the other hand, in relation to the young, lesbian, indigenous and Black women and so on, the dynamic is centrifugal, in other words, it pushes out from a common centre (women), and there is a displacement to a fragmentation and a (shared) differentiation through specificities not reducible to the common term. These are two opposite movements in relation to what seems to be the same question: the request for a rightful and qualified political place within the movement. One of them intends, despite the differences, to show what is similar, while the other intends, although all are women, to point to difference as the locus of legitimacy.

16 The same debate took place on the issue of affirmative action policies and of quotas for Black people at Brazilian universities, regarding who can be considered a Black woman or man and thus be eligible for quotas, through antagonist proposals for self-identification and of hetero-identification (that is, a committee designated by the university must confirm or not the self-identification).
The presence of lesbian, Black and indigenous women is of course not new in feminism. What seemed to appear to be new in the disposition of the speeches presented at the tenth meeting was the political place that this difference took. If questions of race and sexuality, previously identified specificities (with their subjects seen as the 'others' within feminism) in relation to a 'larger identity' (women and/or feminists), are no longer possible, the issue now is, in accordance with these discourses of difference, how can we think of this 'larger identity' without neglecting differences. That is, if at other times these questions were specificities in relation to the general question of who is a 'woman', they are now raised as the central issue. If lesbian and Black women were previously (ignored) elements within the category of 'woman', they are now categories that begin to be seen as central and autonomous in relation to this encompassing signifier. The extreme example of this at the tenth meeting was that, even those women who were previously seen as being representatives of this 'universal feminist subject' (the White, heterosexual, etc. women), now also began speaking from a place of difference. At several moments women took the microphone and in their speeches identified and named themselves as 'we, the heterosexual women' – recognizing in this identification a place of empathy towards the 'others' (lesbian women) who are 'more discriminated and oppressed'. Would it be possible to make a parallel between these discourses, which put the universal feminine (White, heterosexual ...) in the place of difference, and what masculinities studies have tried to do by also bringing the so-called hegemonic masculinities into the field of specificity? Or could a parallel be made with the discussion on feminist men who also exercise a movement of empathy in relation to their 'others'? It would be important to have a more detailed analysis of this heterosexual self-assertion in relation to lesbian sexualities. Isn’t what is apparently a 'self-description', a confirmation of the norm redundant, if we think of gender and sexuality as non-descriptive but normative discourses? It is relevant to contrast this form of self-assertion by heterosexual women with the speech of some lesbians at the meeting. While they were 'speaking as lesbians', they also recognized that this is a contingent and unstable identity. I particularly remember a lesbian activist who introduced herself in this way: 'I am here to speak as a lesbian, not as a fixed and permanent identity, but ...'. This example is useful for discussing the circulation of theories and the movement of interpenetration and circularity of ideas and concepts between academic discourses and theories, and theories and discourses emerging from social movements. What are the political effects of these different identity affirmations – and particularly of the heterosexual self-affirmation, made without the critical reservation (about any fixed identity) that was raised by lesbian speakers?

The way that the young feminists introduced themselves and marked their organized and active presence – by proposing a motion at the end of the meeting
that was signed by different organizations – was also unprecedented in the movement. Until now, young feminists were feminists first: feminists and young, not young and feminists. In my own experience as a member of a feminist group formed by young students, in the early 1980s (the group Liberta was formed at that time by 19–21-year-old students), we presented ourselves to the movement not as young, but as ‘socialist feminists’ and ‘autonomous feminists’ (this self-definition could alternate depending to whom we were speaking). Being formed in part by militants connected at the time to left organizations, its members disputed different positions according to the people they were talking to. In relation to other feminist groups, they wished to distinguish themselves by criticizing what they considered ‘assistencialist policies’ (particularly relating to violence) and a lack of ‘more radical’ policies. On the other hand, regarding the leftist group in which they participated, they considered it ‘not sufficiently feminist’. They engaged themselves in what could be called dual-activism: a leftist activism within feminism and a feminist activism within the left. That is, the difference we evoked was not about generation or identity difference but about conceptions of political principles.

At the tenth meeting, some of the participants affirmed a young identity (which distinguished the ‘youth’ from the ‘adults’). One of the aspects to be discussed about this emergence of youth as a genuine political place within feminism is the trajectory of many of these young women: a significant portion of them are students who have had contact with feminism at university, participating in research centres of gender studies (and where the generational question appears as a central distinction in the relationship between professors and students, between researchers and the students they advise). It was from this place (initially the university) that they began their action and participation in the feminist movement; a trajectory opposite to that of the militant feminists who entered the academy as teachers and researchers in the 1980s. Another factor identified by Sonia Alvarez and Claudia Lima Costa, in a conversation during the meeting, is the fact that the international funding agencies for the gender politics agenda have raised the question of youth in the calls for financing in recent years, which emphasize again the relevance of considering the influence of the policies of funding agencies in the construction of the movements and the academic agenda in the gender field.

Do the tensions and debates at the tenth meeting express something new in feminist politics? Are there common elements in these centripetal and centrifugal movements, between the transgender moves towards a common and inclusive identity, and the other away from a centre, towards a fragmentation of this initial identity of feminism by the young, lesbian, Black, indigenous and rural women? Comparing my own experience as a young feminist in Liberta in the early 1980s with what I observed at Serra Negra, I can not help thinking of a shift in the debate, at that time marked by programmatic and political strategy
issues, related to the general principles of the movement, with a focus on the disagreements, for instance, in relation to the issues of specificity and autonomy (which expressed a division of the movement into a 'women's movement' and a 'feminist movement' at that time). At present, the divisions and divergences are around what I would call 'subjectivity or political identity issues'. If what we saw before was a 'conflict of interpretations and representations' about what the best policies for the movement are, the discussion now focuses on a 'conflict of subjectivities', the questioning of what the rightfully qualified political places of the movement are.

But it is necessary to raise a reservation about this difference of emphasis: the fact that the conflict around subjectivities is also a strong conflict of interpretations, and the way that this happens, its emphasis and omissions, raises significant questions about Brazilian and Latin-American feminisms today. What is the significance of this change in relation to the previous meetings — when the debates focused on the political borders of feminism — for feminisms today? What is the significance of the absence, or low representation of the contingent of women from the popular classes, considering the historical social inequality in Latin America. While the question before was who was or not feminist (initially asked of the dual-militants, and later of the non-feminist women from the lower classes), at the tenth meeting, the focus of the discussion was on the concepts of 'women' and 'gender'. In the final vote, the request for presence by the transgenders was accepted by a substantial majority. The same did not happen to the women on that bus from the favela who knocked on the door of the third meeting at Bertioga.

The importance given to issues of self-identity, that claims the defense of the sovereignty of self-affirmation in the definition of who is a woman or a feminist, is a radical form of the individualistic principle of free-will, which is so dear to the concept of the universal subject and the modern 'subject of reason'. This returns us to the question of who in feminism is still excluded from this opportunity and how much this political dispute focused on the recognition of different identities has reproduced this 'structurally irrelevant' zone inside the movement itself (Thayer, 2001).

**the periphery and its centres (beyond the global and the local as paradigms of contemporary feminist flows)**

The debates discussed above, in addition to being situated at the Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Meetings, reveal a range of questions about contemporary Brazilian and Latin-American feminism that I intend to review through a reflection on the specificities of feminisms on the continent and

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17 I discuss this question of the use of the category 'woman' and of the politics of subjectivity in Brazilian feminism in Maluf (2007).

18 At several moments the discussion about where the line is for who is or is not feminist circulated through several meetings (see Alvarez et al., 2003).
particularly those of Brazil. These issues include: the visibility, inside a movement forum, of theoretical and conceptual issues that are important to the current academic feminist debate in the form of discursive disputes concerning space and power, legitimacy and recognition; the creative force, on the one hand, of the multiplicity of self-identifications and presences that mark differences, and on the other, of the reduction of this multiplicity into identity politics that have frozen this multiplicity and difference and that have effectuated a culturalist reduction (Fraser, 2007) of feminist politics; the weak visibility, and even the discursive exclusion, in these disputes for representation by those who have been the hardest hit by global capitalism and its policies and by the increase of social inequality and poverty, poor women, and particularly in the Brazilian case, poor Black women.

Maria Luísa Femenías has raised the question of the existence of a Latin-American feminism and its specificities and originality. In her opinion, it is exactly the peripheral position of the continent that makes possible a reflection about these issues. Latin-American feminism not only exists, but it has its own roots in the social and political history of the continent, marked by the poor distribution of egalitarian and universalist ideals, rights and living conditions among the population. The presence (and exclusion) of some populations such as the indigenous and Afro-descendent still raises the question of race and mestizaje as one of the central factors that establishes a uniqueness to Latin-American feminism. For Femenías, mestizaje must be understood not only in its ethnic meaning, but also in relation to other spheres, such as the cultural and religious. That is, it shifts the ideas of purity (including that of identity) into a multiplicity of traditions, experiences and narratives. Theorizing about this history and its specificity, and about the ways in which racism and sexism have compounded each other, is an essential task in ‘the search for solutions and alternatives that can favour recognition, distribution and coexistence’. 19

Regarding Brazil, it is the most marked form of a post-slave society (See Carvalho 2002; and Cunha 2002), which despite the myth of its racial democracy, still has an internal social and economic division with strong ethnic distinctions, and of class and gender as well. Slavery subsisted in Brazil for more than 60 years after independence from Portugal in 1822. After the end of slavery, no politics of integration and inclusion of the Afro-descendent people was developed. In 2010, Afro-descendants number more than half of the population and forty three per cent of the persons live in poverty (IPEA, 2009). Black women are the large majority of those living on or beneath the poverty line and most often are the principal income earners in mother-centred families — one of the strongest characteristics of the urban lower classes in Brazil — receiving half of the salary of White women’s salary and a third of White men’s (IPEA, 2009). A feminist politics reduced to an identity affirmation in this case does not contemplate the exclusion and exploitation of this contingent of women. The way this reality of
racial, gender and class inequality has been represented in the Brazilian feminist mainstream is one of the critical questions to be considered. Even if we consider the Black feminist groups and associations, my personal observation is that issues of the poor, working, Black and indigenous women have been very tangential in the various forums of the Brazilian feminist field and only appear when they contemplate the hegemonic language of identity politics. By not relating the struggle over identity to the struggle against social inequality, the presence of these women in feminist politics is reduced to cultural difference and performative democracy. A consideration of the Latin-American specificity, and particularly that of Brazil, must go beyond an adaptation of the identity fight on the global agenda to regional or local particularities. This does not mean abandoning the perspective of platforms, demands and pressure at the global level, because, as Judith Butler has affirmed, it is important to occupy the space of reinventing universalisms. However, the need for an internationalized agenda and action does not invalidate criticism of the fact that what is defined as ‘global feminism’ and its struggles, often reproduces an unequal movement between central and peripheral issues, in which the universal (the global) always has a European–North-American origin. This is feminism constructing its ‘others’ and, in the periphery (inside the alterity), constructing the others of the others.

Thus, if on the one hand it is important not to abandon the universal as a territory for dispute, it is also necessary to reconsider the universal as a part of a local political imaginary that ontologizes itself as universal (and from this, feminism is not excluded).

The national and international feminist mainstream currently recognizes some languages and questions as legitimate elements of its own history. Even the definition of what can or can not be recognized as feminist is connected to a history narrated as being one and the same (Hemmings, 2005), independently of regional differences. It is part of the construction of Latin-American feminism, which considers itself from its specificities, to rebuild and re-narrate its own feminist history (which obviously includes interactions, circulation, exchange and re-appropriation from other histories of feminism); and rethink feminism not only from its intrinsic history, but also from the dynamics that permit its own emergence – the entirety of social movements and political initiatives that combat social injustice and inequality in all its versions.

Concerning the production of theories, concepts and interpretations of this history, in addition to what several scholars have indicated on the question of re-appropriations, re-significations and the necessary betrayals in their local version of theories coming from the centre (see, for examples, Costa 2004; Feminias 2006 and 2007; and Pisicitelli 2005), I believe that two movements are still necessary. One is to consider the originality of locally produced theories (which involves the recognition of this theoretical production outside of the centre). The second is to recognize that what appears as theory produced in the
centre is also produced in historical, political and cultural contexts. These theories are, in some way, local theories too, regardless of their level of abstraction. From this critical perspective, local and global must be seen as relative geopolitical zones, giving place to a new feminist cartography that can help feminism to recognize itself beyond what its hegemonic narratives have established.

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biography

Sônia Weidner Maluf teaches at the Department of Anthropology of Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, coordinates the Research Group on Anthropology of the Contemporary and is one of the coordinators of the Institute of Research Brasil Plural. Previously, she was editor of the journal Estudos Feministas, published in Brazil. Her main research project at this moment is a discussion about the theme of Anthropology of the Subject, in dialogue with feminist theories. She recently developed a study about gender, subjectivity and mental health — discussing the extended consumption of psychotropic drugs among women of different social and cultural strata in Brazil and organized the book Gender, Health and Affliction: Anthropological Approaches. She continues to research and publish on gender; individualism and the contemporary subject; public policies and biopolitics; gender and cinema; Brazilian religiosities.

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